

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## NEWS RELEASE

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### Fraser River Salmon State of Emergency: BC First Nations urge swift action to save Fraser River salmon runs at risk due to Big Bar rockslide

**(Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver)** BC First Nations are expressing grave concern over the possibility of significant losses to critical salmon runs on the Fraser River which are at risk due to the Big Bar rockslide that occurred in late June, and are calling on provincial and federal governments to take immediate action and prioritize saving the jeopardized salmon.

The slide, which occurred in a remote area just west of Clinton, BC, approximately 100 kilometres northwest of Kamloops, has created a five-metre high waterfall which is obstructing salmon from travelling upstream on their migration route to spawning beds. Monitoring reports have indicated only seven hundred fish are known to have gone through as of last week, and it remains unknown how many salmon may be trapped at the base of the blockage.

“The Big Bar rockslide has occurred at the worst possible time of year as key chinook, steelhead, coho and sockeye salmon runs traverse that area of the Fraser River. Any blockage to these salmon runs places a serious risk to the food sovereignty of First Nations all along the Fraser River, particularly those upstream,” said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit political executive. “Immediate mitigation efforts, in consultation with impacted Fraser River First Nations, must be the top priority for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and associated provincial ministries. The blockage not only impacts upstream First Nations’ access to food sources for this year, it has the potential to severely impair future cycles of salmon stocks which will be cause for huge losses to First Nations, commercial and sport fisheries in future years.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated “The Big Bar rockslide is an extreme crisis for our sacred salmon, and we have a responsibility to look after them. We fully support the call from the Fraser Salmon Management Council (FSMC) that all recreational and commercial fisheries fishing Fraser River salmon stocks immediately stop and any contemplated recreational and commercial fishery, including catch and release, not take place until after it is determined that all salmon have safe access around the slide area and that any such openings only be considered after conservation and First Nations priority needs are met.”

“For the past few decades we have watched salmon stocks in the Fraser River, and in many other British Columbia waterways, steadily decline with some populations becoming critically low. Natural disasters such as landslides are becoming more common due to climate change and we are deeply concerned by the Big Bar rockslide and the fragile future of the many salmon species which First Nations depend on for cultural and physical sustenance. Urgent action must



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be taken to mitigate this blockage, not only to ensure the future of salmon survival, but also to provide continued abundance into the future,” stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee.

The FNLC will continue to monitor the situation and will be contacting key ministers to seek commitments to immediate mitigation of the rockslide to maximize salmon migration for this and future years. The FNLC demands that the governments of BC and Canada, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Canadian Military Engineers, immediately expedite the creation and implementation of a plan including full participation of Canoe Creek Band, High Bar Band and Esketemc and all other concerned First Nations, that immediately allows salmon to safely make it through/by/around the slide area.

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